



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

News Release

March 3, 2005

OPERATION PREDATOR ARRESTS SURPASS 5,000

San Diego area accounts for more than 160 arrests in initiative targeting child sex predators

SAN DIEGO – More than 160 of the 5,000 child sex offenders arrested by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) as part of an ongoing international initiative known as Operation Predator have occurred in the San Diego and Imperial Counties.

Michael J. Garcia, Homeland Security Assistant Secretary for ICE, announced today that arrests nationwide in the 20-month long effort have surpassed 5,000. So far there have been 158 Predator-related arrests in San Diego and Imperial Counties. San Diego accounted for the vast majority of those arrests (158), followed by Calexico (3), and Oceanside (1).

Operation Predator is a comprehensive initiative aimed at those who prey on and exploit children, including human traffickers, international sex tourists, Internet pornographers, and foreign national predators whose crimes make them deportable. In the San Diego area, the targets have included a Catholic priest, a retired state auditor, and a Mexican national who attempted to rape a nine-year-old girl.

“Sexual predators will not go unpunished for their heinous crimes,” said Garcia. “Whether the criminal is a U.S. citizen who thinks they can travel overseas to molest children or a pornographer who trades in images of child sexual abuse or a foreign national who has lost the privilege to remain in the U.S. because of a crime against a child, ICE will identify, arrest, and, where possible, remove them.”

Operation Predator evolved out of ICE’s mission to find and deport illegal aliens -- particularly those with criminal records, and reflects the agency’s traditional public safety mission. Those arrested fall into four general categories:

Foreign National Child Predators: More than 85 percent of the arrests made as part of Operation Predator have been arrests of foreign national sex offenders whose crimes make them removable from the United States. To date, more than 2,100 of these predators have been deported. Locally, those cases include:

❑ ***Mexican National Convicted of Attempting to Rape a Nine-Year-Old Girl:***

Manuel Perez Lizarraga, 57, was convicted of attempting to rape a nine-year-old girl and has an extensive criminal history that also includes convictions for false imprisonment and battery. After lengthy litigation in the immigration court, Lizarraga was ordered deported last month. ICE officers arrested Lizarraga at his residence in National City on February 23, 2005 and deported him to Mexico that day.

❑ ***Local Gang Member Convicted of Sexual Battery on a Fifteen-Year-Old Female:***

Martin Castro Liera, 40, a documented gang member, was convicted of sexual battery against a female minor and was deported on February 24, 2005. Within one week, Liera illegally re-entered the United States and was arrested at his residence on March 2, 2005 by ICE Fugitive Operations Unit in San Diego.

International Child Sex Tourists: Working cooperatively with foreign governments through ICE's attaché offices worldwide, ICE agents made the first 12 arrests under the child sex tourism provisions of the PROTECT Act. A local case involves a former state auditor who pleaded guilty yesterday to federal charges yesterday:

❑ ***San Diego Man Charged with Seducing Filipino Boys with Gifts of Food and Clothing:***

Edilberto Datan, 61, is charged with traveling to the Philippines to have sex with 14 and 15-year-old boys. Datan was arrested late last year at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) after returning from a trip to the Philippine Island of Cebu. Officers at LAX found computer memory sticks in Datan's luggage and digital camera containing more than 200 sexually explicit images of teenage Filipino boys. Datan told ICE agents the boys were part of a Filipino dance troupe he knew through friends. Two of the charges against Datan, those involving child sex tourism and producing child pornography abroad, are being brought under provisions of the PROTECT Act. The PROTECT Act substantially strengthened federal laws against predatory crimes involving children outside the United States by modifying the burden of proof requirements for federal prosecutors to bring charges.

Human Smuggling & Trafficking of Children: The criminal networks engaged in human smuggling and trafficking have become more violent and more profit-driven than ever before. At the same time, some of their victims are getting younger and younger. Consider this example:

❑ ***Orange County Couple Charged for Holding Egyptian Girl as Domestic Slave:*** Eid Youssef Ibrahim, 44, and Amal Ahmed Ewis-abd Motelib, 41, are under indictment in Los Angeles on involuntary servitude charges for allegedly enslaving a 12-year-old girl in the garage of their Irvine home for two years and forcing her to work as a domestic servant for their family. The couple, who were married at the time of the offense, are accused of conspiring to hold the victim in involuntary servitude and obtain her services by force and coercion.

Internet Child Pornography: Drawing on ICE's cyber crime investigative expertise, ICE is tackling the crimes that cross the nation's virtual borders. Moreover, through the National Child Victim Identification System, more than 1,600 pornographic images containing child pornography have been authenticated.

❑ ***San Diego Priest Charged on 20 Counts of Possessing Child Pornography:***

ICE agents in San Diego arrested Gary Holtey, a local priest and director of a parish school and its day care center early last year. Holtey subscribed to several child pornography websites. The San Diego District Attorney filed 20 separate misdemeanor counts against Holtey for possession of child pornography. He is presently awaiting sentencing and has been removed from his position at the local church.

Additional information about Operation Predator is available on the Web at www.ice.gov. ICE encourages the reporting of suspected child predators and any suspicious activity through its toll-free hotline at 1-866-DHS-2ICE. This hotline is staffed around the clock by investigators.

Suspected child sexual exploitation or missing children may be reported to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, an Operation Predator partner, at 1-800-843-5678 or <http://www.cybertipline.com>.

Editor's Note: B-roll, including video of arrests, an interview with Assistant Secretary Garcia, and graphics will be available via satellite at 12:00 noon PST. The coordinates for the video feed are: GALAXY 3/C-Band Transponder 6, Vertical: 95° West, Downlink frequency: 3820 Mhz.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.